

Poems for Roman

by Svitlana Povalyaeva¹

I want to dedicate these poems to my son Roman Ratushnyi, who was killed in action on 8th June 2022, during a reconnaissance mission in Kharkiv Oblast in the war against the Russian invaders. In his will, Roman quoted my poem "Men carry trees" and added: "I love you :)"

My heart, I did not know that you read my poems and even knew them enough to quote them, expressing your last will... I will love you to the end, dear - may all my poems belong to you, may people remember you when they read them. Love you :)

1.

напросився в літо, сам був як літо гарячим,
із медовою шкірою, розфокусованим поглядом,
божевільним, лагідним, мудрим, диким, незрячим,
брав усе що хотів, наривався на подвиги.
йшов зненацька, усе забрав із собою.

¹ Svitlana Povalyaeva is a Ukrainian writer and poet. She received a degree in journalism at the National Shevchenko University in Kyiv and worked as a journalist for a number of years at the major TV channels and media outlets. Svitlana is the author of eight books, one of which is a collection of poetry "After Crimea" that was written after the annexation of Crimea. Her second poetry book will be published in Ukraine by the end of 2022. Over the years, Svitlana took part in countless major literary events, festivals and forums as an author, presenter, and speaker. She practices Buddhism, which has an important influence on her writing. Svitlana is a long-standing civil activist. She took an active part in the Revolution of Dignity (also known as Euromaidan) in Kyiv in 2013-2014 together with her two sons. Her younger son Roman Ratunyi was a well-known Ukrainian public figure, a defender of green recreational zones of the city of Kyiv, an author of original forms of municipal activism and resistance to corruption, which went far beyond environmental issues, and a volunteer soldier. When the full-scale Russian invasion broke down on February 24, 2022, Roman enlisted as a volunteer and fought in the battle for Kyiv, he took part in the de-occupation of Kyiv Oblast and later joined the 93rd separate mechanized brigade of the Ukrainian Armed Forces "Kholodnyi Yar" where he was a part of the military intelligence unit. Roman took part in the liberation of the town of Trostyanets and fought in Sumy Oblast. He was killed in action near Iziium, Kharkiv Oblast on June 8, 2022. The sentence written by Roman in his last will and testament is symbolic: "Kyiv, I died far from you, but I died for you". Roman became an inspiration for thousands of Kyiv residents and a symbol of the young generation of Ukrainians.

повертався раптово з піском у волоссі і літом в кишенях,
 з алкоголем, з моїми ключами, з дикою аличею, із внутрішнім боєм
 за наврочену осінь за порожнечу в легенях.
 напросився в осінь і осінь текла і пашіла
 під вагою нестерпно спекотного літа.
 цю смаглявість млосну твою розірвала б на атоми й знову би купи зліпила,
 борівітером відпустила б у тихий ясний несповитий
 світ синяви і золота, болю й нестерпної легкості,
 світ прозорої туги за рідним у всеохопності,
 світ без сенсів і тягlosti крізь зимові полеглості
 незліченних берсерків твоєї самотности

You left in summer. And like the summer itself
 you were hot-blooded with honeyed skin and searching looks.
 Mad, mild, wise, wild, blind,
 you took all that you wanted in your exploits.
 You left when everything was gone
 and returned suddenly with sand in your hair, summer in your pockets,
 with booze, my keys, with wild cherries, and an internal battle
 against the coming fall, against emptiness in your lungs.
 You let in autumn and it toiled,
 plowing under the weight of the unbearably hot summer.
 I would tear this darkness from you, ripping it atom-by-atom,
 and reassemble you from the heaps that remain.
 I'd release the kestrel of you to a quiet, clear, unbound world
 of blue and gold, of pain and unbearable lightness,
 a world of transparent longing for the quilt of a homeland,
 a world without senses, without the burden of winter depressions
 of the countless berserkers of your loneliness.

Translated by Grace Mahoney

2.

вони просто виходили кожен зі свого оточення
 - з того, звідки походили
 коли кожен на власний розсуд
 на власній війні заморочений, зурочений, поторочений
 кожен видих між поділом і розподілом
 тим вододілом, може, ні, не тим напророченим,
 при подолі запряним але вишитим..
 може, сестриним, може мамчиним,
 а чи бабиним..
 й жоден з них не спромігся полишити.. відпустити поділ й вийти з краденим
 за ті межі мережані, так прокладені
 аби кожен син дійшов до батьківства
 аби жодна з жон не цуралася вдівства
 аби їхнє дитя - золотаве мале буддисько
 белькотіло би українською

They simply left – each from his own encampment
 from which he came,
 when, each by his own decision,
 had gone to his own war – frozen, cursed, mixed up.
 Each exhale skirts between division and distribution,
 to this ridge, maybe, no, not that prophesized one
 at this hem – washed out but stitched...
 maybe by your sister, or by your mommy,
 maybe by your granny...
 cause not one of them managed to leave...
 to rip from the seam with stolen goods
 beyond these borders a woven expanse
 where every son reaches fatherhood,
 where every wife avoids widowhood,
 so that their child – flaxen baby buddha –
 would babble in Ukrainian.

Translated by Grace Mahoney

*Close Encounters in War Journal – Stories and Poems of Close Encounters in War
 Poetry*

цей світ п'ятивимірний квіти і ринь поміж пальців
 як віяло в пасодоблі шторму як пахощі на язиці
 тримає мене між звуків піском притрусив свій фальцет
 стирає пам'ять людську мені по руці
 ворожить мені по хребту і ключицях
 але нічого не каже – тіннями лише усміхається
 люстро до люстерка всі драми в особах і лицях
 на лезах веселки ніколи не починаються
 цей світ завмирає на видиху мертвим метеликом
 чії кольори тривають як плями бензину в калюжах
 ти більше мені не печеш і я думаю що це велико
 водночас тебе відчувати й про тебе не думати, друже

this world is five-dimensional
 flowers and pebbles between fingers
 like a fan waved in a pasodoble of a storm
 like a fragrance on the tongue
 it holds me amongst the sounds
 its falsetto is dusted with sand
 it wipes off human memory from my arm
 tells fortune on my spine and collarbones
 but not utters a word – just smiles with shadows
 mirror to mirror
 all dramas in characters and faces
 rainbows never take a beginning on the edge of a blade
 this world freezes like a dead exhaled butterfly
 the colors on its wings as long-lasting as splashes of gasoline in a puddle
 you do not burn me anymore
 and I think it is big
 to feel you and not to think about you at the same time
 my friend

Translated by Victoria Narizhna

3.

Ракети ковзають моєю шкірою ніби ті дрібні рибки у теплих бурштинових водах
Десни

Я з дитинства знаю цей лоскіт: деякі рибки своїми беззубими ротиками
намагаються їсти твою шкіру

Цілунок маленьких рибок на своїх литках я відчуваю досі - бо я досі маю щастя
зайти в Десну

Про ракети моя шкіра просто знає, щоразу, коли вони летять на Україну і в
Україну, пролітають над Києвом, над Дніпром і Десною

Але я нічого не відчуваю, навіть лоскоту у діафрагмі

Смертельних цілунків не відчувають живі

Rockets graze my skin like the tiny fish in the amber-warm waters of the Desna.
Since childhood, I've known these small pecks: ravenous fish with
toothless mouths,

and I still feel these kisses fresh on my calves because I still go to that river.

These bumps raise at the whirl of rockets over Ukraine, Kyiv, the Dnipro, and the Desna.

But that's all I feel. Nothing else stirs within me, not even a twinge in my diaphragm,
because deadly kisses aren't felt by the living.

Translated by Grace Mahoney

4.

той, хто звільняв міста від ворога, не звільнить тебе від себе.
той, хто висоти брав, не візьме тебе з собою, не візьме до моря, взагалі не візьме.
той, хто ішов у кривавий тан, пройде повз тебе сліпо.
той, хто захищав рідну землю від гвалту, не захистить тебе від печалі.
ночами стільки світла в містах, що ховаються зорі.
Той не знає, коли ти бажання загадуєш, а коли зриваєшся й падаєш,
падаєш в забуття і впадаєш у річку,
в річку, яка тебе прийме і візьме з собою до моря.

he who has been liberating cities from the enemy
won't liberate you from himself.
he who has been taking high grounds
won't take you to the sea and won't take you at all.
he who has been walking into a blood bath
will walk blindly past you.
he who has been shielding his homeland from defilement
won't shield you from sorrow.
at night there is so much light in the cities
that stars hide from it.
he doesn't know when you make a wish
and when you trip and fall,
fall into oblivion and flow into the river,
the river which will embrace you and take you to the sea.

Translated by Victoria Narizhna